

An Assessment of “Replacement Theology”

The Relationship Between the Israel of the Abrahamic-Davidic Covenant and the Christian Church

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.¹

Replacement theology is not a new arrival in the theological arena, for it probably has its origins in an early political-ecclesiastical alliance forged between Eusebius Pamphilus and the Emperor Constantine.² Constantine, regarding himself as God's representative in his role as emperor, gathered all the bishops together on the day of his tricennalia (30th anniversary of his reign), an event, incidentally, which he saw as the foreshadowing of the eschatological Messianic banquet. The results of that meeting, in Eusebius' mind, made it unnecessary to distinguish any longer between the Church and the Empire, for they appeared to merge into one fulfilled kingdom of God on earth in the present time.³ Such a maneuver, of course, nicely evacuated the role and the significance of the Jewish people in any kingdom considerations. Here began the long trail of replacement theology.

Replacement theology, then, declared that the Church, Abraham's spiritual seed, had replaced national Israel in that it had transcended and fulfilled the terms of the covenant given to Israel, which covenant Israel had lost because of obedience.⁴ Tom Wright makes the point even more adamantly when he affirmed:

Modern attempts to revive such a geographical nationalism, and to give it a “Christian” coloring, provoke the following, most important, theological reflection: the attempt to “carry over” some Old Testament promises about Jerusalem, the Land or the Temple for fulfilment in our own day has the same theological shape as the attempt in pre-Reformation Catholicism to think of Christ as being re-crucified in every Mass.

He Continued:

The work of Christ is once again “incomplete.” ... [This] is not only “Christian Zionism,” ... it is also, more significantly, ‘Christian anti-semitism.’ If the wrath of God spoken of by Jesus and Paul was truly *finished* with the awful events of AD 70, then the only appropriate attitude in subsequent generations towards Jews, the Temple, the Land or Jerusalem must be one of sorrow

¹ Walter C. Kaiser is Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Director for the Foundation of Biblical Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological School, Massachusetts. He is the author of many books.

² I am indebted to Daniel Gruber's seminal research in his volume *The Church and the Jews: The Biblical Relationship*, Springfield, Mo.: General Council of the Assemblies of God, Intercultural Ministries Department, 1991, pp. 8-10.

³ Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History*; tr. by Christian Fredrick Cruse. Book 3, chapter 36, p. 120 as cited by Daniel Gruber, p. 24. Gruber (p. 10) also points to V. Kesich, “Empire-Church Relations and the Third Temptation,” *Studia Patristica*, Vol IV, Berlin 1961, pp. 468-469.

⁴ Some, such as my good friend Chris Wright, strenuously object to the use of the terms “Replacement” or “supersession” as the way to describe the views of this position. In the view of many in this school, the “promise is now being fulfilled through a multi-national people, the Jew and Gentile in Christ, [with] the ‘forever’ aspects of nation-state, land, king, king and priest [being] likewise transcended, taken up, and fulfilled.” “A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy Concerning Israel,” in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purpose of God*, ed. by P.W.L. Walker, Cambridge: Tyndale 1992, p. 6.

or pity ... To that extent, "Christian Zionism" is the geographical equivalent of a *soi-disant* "Christian" apartheid, and ought to be rejected as such.⁵

There are at least five fatal flaws in the thinking of those supporting the replacement covenant thesis: 1) The "New Covenant" was made with the house of Israel and Judah. God never made a formal covenant with the Church; 2) The failure of the Jews, like the failure of the Church, was calculated in the plan of God (Rom 11:8); 3) The New Testament clearly teaches that God has not cast off disobedient Israel (Rom 11:1,25-26), for they are the natural branches into which the Church has been grafted; 4) The "eternal" aspect of the promise of the land is not to be equated with the "eternal" aspect of the Aaronic priesthood (I Chr 23:13) or the Rechabite descendants (Jer 35:19); and 5) Paul's allegory of Galatians 4:21-31 does not teach that national Israel has been replaced by the Church; it teaches that the quest for justification by works leads to bondage whereas justification by faith and grace leads to freedom and salvation. Each of these theses must be examined in as much detail as the space here allows.

The New Covenant

God never made a covenant with the Church as such; the "New Covenant," in which the Church now shares, is the one that God originally made "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31b). No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to make a case for equating the house of Israel and Judah with the Christian Church! And even those who argue that the equation should be made only with "Israel", are unable to establish that any of the 73 appearances of the word "Israel" in the New Testament, or the four appearances of "Israelite(s)", is equated in the text with the Church — not even in one text. And even those who make such a false equation, and who then go about contemporizing the message of the Old Testament, do not make the equation uniformly of all references to "Israel" and "Judah" when interpreting the Old Testament. Only when something good is said about "Israel" is there a tendency to understand that the Church is being spoken of. When something bad is said of "Israel" in the Old Testament, usually that is left as a word about national Israel by modern holders of this theory — a most unsporting way to proceed!

No other covenant is mentioned by the New Testament. Thus, the new covenant was not even made with the elect, the faithful, or the believing; it was made with northern and southern Israel, *qua* "Israel". And the gospel presented in the new covenant was a continuation of God's dealings with Israel; in fact, it was from the Old Testament that the early church got her message of good news that she proclaimed with such joy in all those years from approximately AD 30 to AD 50-70, before the New Testament was revealed by God.

The Failure of Israel

Israel's disobedience and dispersion were not the end of her calling, for God had announced in the New Testament that his "gifts and his call were irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). In fact, rather than Israel's disobedience serving as a signal that her usefulness in the divine plan had ceased, the reverse was asserted by the apostle Paul. As Hendrikus Berkof put it, "She is and remains the link between the Messiah and the nations. She could be this link through her obedience, but even now, in her disobedience, she still fulfills her functions as a link."⁶ That is why Paul claimed that "because of [Israel's] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:11).

⁵ Tom Wright, "Jerusalem in the New Testament," *Jerusalem, Past and Present in the Purpose of God*, Walker, P.W.L. (Ed.) Cambridge: Tyndale, 1992, pp. 73-74,75. The rather strong nature of the language used here does not seem to be the usual style of publications emanating from this source.

⁶ Berkhof, Hendrikus, *Christ, the Meaning of History*, tr. by Lambertus Buurman. Richmond: Knox 1966, pp. 144-145.

Another indication that Israel's rejection of the Messiah and her present disobedience (to speak, for the moment, of the vast majority of her people) was not the final episode in the whole drama of her salvation, can be seen in Romans 11:15. Paul argues there that "if [Israel's] rejection means the reconciliation of the world (in that gentiles would be given an opportunity to come to the Messiah as never before), what will [Israel's] acceptance mean but life from the dead?" It is possible that this phrase that we have emphasized in the last quote could be taken spiritually, but Scripture does not appear to treat it in that manner.⁷ Instead, it appears to be picking up the very figure used by Ezekiel 37:12,14, where the Lord said, "O my people. I am going to open up your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel ... I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you down in your own land." Thus, the dry bones would be brought back together again and the breath of God would be breathed into the bones that had lain scattered all over the valley floor. If some would prefer to treat this passage as a prediction of an individual's bodily resurrection, the divine interpreter himself will disallow it, for Ezekiel 37:11 declared, "Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are *the whole house of Israel*'" (emphasis mine). Therefore, it would be only fair to conclude that Paul was referring to the reestablishment of Israel as God's people in the land again when he mentioned that Israel's acceptance of her Messiah in the end times will mean "Life from the dead."

But in the meantime, note the logic here. If so much good has come to the world because of Israel's disobedience, exclaims Paul, can anyone imagine what the world is in for when Israel is once again accepted back into the fold of God? Why, it would be like receiving dead people back to life. And the reverberations of such an event will indeed be earth-shaking!

But the plan of God had deliberately calculated the failure of Israel and her people. Romans 11:8 affirmed, using the informing theology of Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10, that "God gave [Israel] a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they should not hear, to this very day." Thus, the spiritual slumber in which Israel currently tosses is divinely induced! God thereby insured, in that sense, that all Israel would not believe so that salvation might come to the gentiles through those Jews who did not believe. And so it happened that "because of [Israel's] disobedience," divine mercy was shown to the gentiles — and that condition persists down "to this very day," Paul adds.

Of course there are a large number of Jewish people that do believe; however, the "full number" of Jewish believers (Rom 11:12) will not come "until the full number of the gentiles has come in" (Rom 11:25). Therefore, it was not a matter of Israel's faithfulness, or her ability to retain what was stated with her — nor has it ever been. That assessment would need to be made of all the peoples of the world, for as the Psalmist said, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."

Natural and Wild Olive Branches

Romans 11 is the *crux interpretum* for all who tackle the problem of the relationship between Israel and the Church. And the assumption of some⁸ that "all Israel shall be saved" really refers to the New Testament Church, becomes entirely impossible as the chapter proceeds, especially in Romans 11:25-26. Perhaps this is why many who assume this position, though not all, find it more convenient to ignore Romans 11 altogether, and instead, build their positions on logical

⁷ "Life from the dead" is never used in a spiritual sense argued Henrikus Berkhof. Berkhof, pp. 144-145.

⁸ Usually this view is associated with many (but not necessarily all, for the leading exponent of a premillennial theology at the turn of the century were mainly from this tradition) who hold to Covenant Theology. For example, see such a Reformation commentator as Martin Luther in his *Commentary on Romans*, chapter 11.

extrapolations of their theologies, rather than on explicit exegesis of texts of Scripture at that point.

It is clear from Romans 11:13 that Paul is addressing his remarks in this chapter to gentiles. It may well have been that Paul sensed that the gentile Christians were becoming a bit arrogant towards the unbelieving Jewish community, perhaps thinking that God had indeed closed the book on his dealings with this national people with whom he had had such a long history of relations. But that may be the precise reason why Paul began with the rhetorical question in Romans 11:1, "I say then, Did God reject his people?" Paul thunders his answer: "By no means!" Consider me, he continued, for I too am from the physical seed of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin — neither of which is meant to be a means of expressing his identity in this setting with the Church.

Paul was not attempting to sustain the general argument of God's faithfulness to all believers, that is to say that God had not cast off Abraham's spiritual seed, as Paul had allowed in Galatians 3:29, and so he had thereby proved himself faithful. If Paul had meant to say that, what was the point of his raising his physical, tribal ancestry in Israel? No, God still loved the nation Israel, the people whom he "foreknew" (11:2). And just as God had reserved in Elijah's day a "remnant" of 7000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal, so "at the present time" God also had a "remnant chosen by grace" (11:5) in the nation of Israel. If that remnant in Elijah's day was Jewish, chances were very good that that was what the remnant was meant to be in Paul's argument. It will make no sense to have Paul arguing that God has a gentile "people" (11:1) of faith out of which he has secured a believing remnant (11:4-5) for himself. The logic would fall under its own weight — who are these gentile believing "peoples" out of which God has secured an alternate believing remnant?

Paul goes on to distinguish two groups in Israel: 1) "the elect" (11:7) or "chosen" (11:5); and 2) "the rest" or "the others" (11:7). God's grace had given to the first group of Israelites what the second group of Israelites sought, but had not obtained (11:7): salvation.

Now here is the marvel of the whole affair: when the root of a tree is holy, the branches will also be holy (11:16b). The reference to their roots must be to the promises made to the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Alas, however, "some of the (natural) branches were broken off" (11:17) because of their unbelief. But the temporary loss to these natural branches of the tree resulted in an enormous bonanza for the gentiles (11:12). And lest the gentile believers become too puffed up in their own conceits, as if what they now have in Christ was the result of their own searching and finding, any more than it was of "the rest" of Israel's searching, Paul warns the gentile believers not to "boast over those branches," for the gentile church does not exist for the sake of the Jews, nor was the root of the Church's faith in herself, "but the [Jewish] root supports [the gentile believers]" (11:18). Rather than replacing the former branches, the newly grafted in branches were anchored and provided for in the roots that had been sunk into the earth in the promises given to the Jewish patriarchs!

In fact, rather than lording it over the unbelieving Jewish branches that were cut off because of their unbelief, the gentile believers were to remember that "God is able to graft them [the natural Jewish branches] in again" (11:23) to the olive tree. It is the gentile church that is the anomaly here: it represents the wild olive tree that was grafted into the cultivated olive. (Paul realizes that he has reversed the horticultural analogy for the sake of his illustration. Normally wild stock is used as the base on which to graft cultivated branches; that is not the case here [11:24].) Thus, all who wish to view the believing Church as the newest show in town which some Jewish believers may join if they realize that the Church is an innovative gentile creation, Paul sends a warning salvo over the bow of all such enterprises. Gentiles are not, and never were, the natural branches: Israel was and still is!

What then is the answer to the big question? Does God have a plan for physical, national Israel in the future? Or is such a hope tantamount, as one writer said, making her a

co-redemptrix⁹ with Christ, or introducing “Christian Zionism”¹⁰ and “Christian apartheid”¹¹ into the Bible?

Romans 11:25-26 answers that question. “Israel has experienced a hardening in part *until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved*” (emphasis mine). God is not finished with his people Israel as yet. Therefore to express that he is, not runs run right in the face not only of these verses, but also misconstrues the line of continuity that God has built into the whole soteriological process that involved Jew and gentile from the very beginning (e.g. Rom 1:16) and casts off a balanced doctrine of ecclesiology. Look, therefore, for Israel to suddenly obtain one of these days what she has sought in vain (as far as most of her people are concerned) for all these long years without finding it. The number of Israelites who will be saved is called “the fullness” (Greek *pl̥roma*), or as the same word is translated in verse 25, “full number;” exactly paralleling, incidentally, the number of gentiles = “full number” (v. 25) who have come to the Savior.

The late Anthony A. Hoekema¹² raised two objections to our argument. First of all, he complained, Romans 11:26 did not say, “And *then* [implying the Greek word *tote* or *epeita*, a temporal usage] all Israel will be saved.” Instead, the Greek used (*kai*) *hout̥s*, meaning “thus,” “so,” “in this manner,” describing the *manner* in which it would happen, not the temporal succession of events. In other words, according to Hoekema, Paul was not saying “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the time when the full number of the gentiles has been reached, and *then* (after this has happened) all Israel will be saved.” Instead, Hoekema urged that Paul was saying that Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel (with Hoekema’s new meaning of Israel) will be saved. In other words, the text taught not the timing for this event, but it described the manner in which it would happen, according to Hoekema.

Hoekema’s second objection was that it did injustice to the word “all” in “all Israel will be saved” to limit this enormous ingathering of Jews to the Messiah just to the end times. That generation would only be a fragment of the large number of generations that had passed by in the meantime, so how could one possibly claim that “all Israel” had been redeemed?

Hoekema had been answered, however, 13 years before he wrote by the Dutch Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof. To the first objection he replied:

We do not read “then” or “after this,” but there is no reason to exclude the possibility that this “and so” is a future event. Paul is dealing with the historical order of God’s activities, and only just before used the conjunction “until” (25). Yet, “and so” implies more than “until.” However, it is less clear what the antecedent of “and so” is.¹³

Berkhof went on to suggest that the antecedent of “and so” probably is “until the full number of the gentiles has come in” (the meaning being that since the “full number” had come in, all Israel could now be saved). Or, one could read, “and so all Israel will be saved” (meaning, the last would be first, and the first temporarily last).

But the point that both Hoekema and Berkhof missed was that Romans 11:27 linked this “and so” with “this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” This was nothing less than a reference to the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34), also called “My Covenant,” the “Eternal Covenant,” and the “New Heart and New Spirit” in 16 other passages.¹⁴ The contents

⁹ So complained John R. Wilch, “The land and State of Israel in Prophecy and Fulfillment,” *Concordia Journal* 8 (1982): 173. See Walter Kaiser, Jr., “Must the Christian Include Israel and Her Land in a Contemporary Theology?”, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987, pp. 46-58.

¹⁰ See footnote 4.

¹¹ See footnote 4.

¹² Hoekema, Anthony A., *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, pp. 144-145.

¹³ Berkhof, pp. 145-146.

¹⁴ Kaiser, Walter C., Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological*

of this New Covenant were an expansion of the promises that had been made to Abraham and David and a renewal of the promise that God would send a Seed, the Messiah, be their God, use Israel as his means of blessing all the nations on the earth, and grant them the land as an eternal inheritance. Thus we are brought back to the land promise and to the destiny that God has shaped from the beginning for his people Israel. Indeed, in the very context from which the New Covenant comes (Jer 31:31-34), there is a renewed emphasis on the land promise once again (Jer 31:35-40)! This promise about the land and the future of the nation Israel could be nullified if the sun and moon were to cease shining; however, in the event that both the sun and the moon continued (as I just checked out my window to see if this covenant was still on), then for just that same period of time God would continue to maintain his promises named in that context. Even the late highly regarded Reformed theologian John Murray commented, after rightly noticing that Romans 11:26-27 were citations from Isaiah 59:20-21 and Jeremiah 31:34:

There should be no question but Paul regards these Old Testament passages as applicable to the restoration of Israel. We cannot dissociate this covenantal assurance from the proposition in support of which the text is adduced or from which follows in verse 28 (on account of the patriarchs). Thus the effect is that the future restoration of Israel is certified by nothing less than the certainty belonging to covenantal institutions.¹⁵

Accordingly, even though the "and so" of this passage in Romans 11 may not be temporal in its reference, nevertheless, it is sequential and consequential in that it ties the promises of the patriarchal-Davidic-New Covenant with the coming in of the "full number," or the "full inclusion," of Israel. Once this is admitted, the unity and the connectedness of the three elements of Messiah, gospel and land come back into play as part of a fully developed theology.

As for Hoekema's second complaint about limiting the "full inclusion" to the end times, we can only argue that this is a refusal to see that the past and present remnant of Israel are the foundation and guarantee that God would complete his work in a grand eschatological and climactic act. Repeatedly, the prophets of the Old Testament had depicted an Israelite remnant returning to the land (e.g., Isa 10:20-30) and becoming prominent among the nations (Mic 4:1) in the end day. In fact, Zechariah 10:8-12 is still repeating this same promise in 518BC, well after the days when many in Israel had returned from their last and final exile, the Babylonian Exile.

Thus, we conclude that God has not cast off disobedient Israel and replaced her with the Christian church for all time and eternity. The natural branches, meaning present day Israel, must not be regarded as dead and gone forever in the program of God, for one day he will re-graft those natural branches into the trunk from which they were once broken off. In the meantime, the wild branches, now the believing gentiles, must not get on their high horses and get all high and mighty about being the tree into which everyone else must be united. God never made a covenant with the Church — believe me! The only covenant was with the house of Judah and the house of Israel. The roots of the tree of faith still remain the promises given to the patriarchs.

The Question of Eternality

The promise of God regarding Israel and her land was said to be an "everlasting" or "eternal" covenant in its scope. But many scholars, such as Chris Wright, admonish that "The expression 'forever' (le-olam) needs to be seen, not so much in terms of 'everlastingness' in linear time,

Society 15 (1972), pp. 11-23. Also reprinted in *The Bible and Its Literary Milieu*, ed. by John Maier and Vincent Tollers, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 106-120.

¹⁵ Murray, John, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 2: pp. 99-100.

but rather as an intensive expression within the terms, conditions and context of the promise concerned.”¹⁶ Wright points out that the Rechabites were promised descendants “forever” (Jer 35:19), but if this were a straight forward prediction, where are their descendants today, queries Wright? In like manner, Wright pointed to the house of David and the Levitical priesthood, in which the same form was used about their longevity in Jeremiah 33:17-22.

However, Jeremiah 35:19 does not use the Hebrew word *le-olam*, “forever” or “everlasting”; instead, it uses the expression literally translated, “a man shall not be cut off from before my presence...”). The same expression is used of the Levites and David in Jeremiah 33:17. Note, however, when the word *olam* is used of David or the Aaronic line of the Levites, it has reference to the *office*, not the person, of the Davidic king or the priesthood! And if it be doubted what this Hebrew word signifies, let it be remembered that the promise to the descendants of Israel and the provision of the office of the Messianic King and Messianic priesthood is as lasting as the sun and moon according to Jeremiah 31:35-40 and 33:17-22.

The careful definition of Daniel Gruber merits close examination. He explained:

The claim that the Hebrew word for “forever” or “everlasting” really means “to the end of the age” is only partially true. In some cases it does mean that, but that is not all it means. The English word “always” provides a helpful parallel. It means “every time,” but it also means “as long as,” and “forever.”

There are actually several different Hebrew expressions used to signify “forever.” Most of them use the word *olam* by itself or with a prefix or suffix. Examples are *me-olam* (from *olam*, *le-olam* to *olam*), and *olamim* (the plural of *olam*). Looking at the use of such words in context is very helpful in understanding the meaning that they are given in the Bible.¹⁷

Gruber then proceeds to show how each of these combinations of the word *olam* are used in various contexts. First, this word is used to express the length of time that God will be God in Genesis 21:33; or that God would be King (Jer 10:10) and his reign would endure (Ps 66:7). Therefore, when God gave the land of Canaan to Israel “for an *everlasting* possession” (*olam*) in Genesis 17:8 and 48:3, 4, there is a strong presumption in favor of seeing that there could be just as abiding a promise in linear terms as was true of God himself, who is “everlasting” and “eternal” (at least so far as what the term could potentially mean). It did not need to be merely an intensive expression within certain boundaries or limits of expression.

Our point has been to show that the word “forever” is not limited in every instance of its usage, for there are numerous examples of its meaning that transcend such boundaries. When the additional phrases that are used in numerous contexts about the land being given in perpetuity to Israel and of the enduring nature of God's promises to Israel as a nation are all added up, the impression of all the contexts is overwhelmingly in favor of an oath delivered by God that is as enduring as the shining of the sun and moon (e.g., Jer 33:17-22).

The Allegory of Galatians 4:21-31

Paul's allegory in Galatians 4:21-31 has often been understood to teach that national Israel has now been replaced by the Christian Church. But this is to completely misunderstand what Paul intended and the audience to whom he addressed his remarks.¹⁸

Paul's audience was primarily a gentile audience. And the issue at hand was whether gentiles should submit to physical circumcision in order to be righteous before God. If one misses this key point, the meaning of Paul's allegory will be lost and wrong meanings will be found where they do not exist.

¹⁶ Chris Wright, p. 6.

¹⁷ Gruber, pp. 339-341.

¹⁸ Here again I am indebted to Daniel Gruber and his remarkable work entitled *The Church and the Jews*. See his discussion on this allegory on pp. 210-212, which I now follow rather closely.

The comparisons are seen in a series of related pairs: two sons, two cities, two mountains, two conditions, two destinies, and two covenants. Some of these comparisons need to be filled in from one's knowledge of the Scriptures, e.g., Abraham had two sons: one is named Isaac, but the other, Ishmael, is not named.

What, then, is Paul trying to say? Is he declaring that the Jews were cast out and that the Church is now the heir? To say this would be to confuse the opposites that Paul is using: the opposite of the Jew is not the Church, but the gentile. If one wants to learn what Paul's opposite for the Church is, it must be the "unbeliever," not the Jew. For even Paul himself was once a persecutor of those who believed in the Messiah. In that action, he was much like Ishmael,¹⁹ born of the flesh and destined to be cast out. But when he believed, he became like Isaac, destined to be an heir, and part of the persecuted seed of promise. But the same could be said for a gentile like Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, who at first persecuted Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:17). But when he too became a believer, he moved from one side of this allegory to the other side (I Cor 1:1).

Gruber aptly concludes,

The point is not that one's physical ancestry necessarily leads to bondage, for neither Gentiles nor Jews need remain in a lost state. It is the quest for justification through the works of the law (by both Jew and Gentile, we might add), rather than through grace and faith, that leads to bondage. Paul was writing to gentiles in Galatia who were making the wrong choice, which would eventually lead them back into bondage and a disinherited state, and eventually turn them into persecutors.²⁰

Conclusion

Replacement theology is just plain bad news for both the Church and Israel. It must be stressed repeatedly that no part of the Church believed such a doctrine until Constantine introduced it in the fourth century of the Christian era under a false axis, in which the Church and the Empire were forged into an alternate alliance by the Emperor Constantine and the Church Father Eusebius. The effect was to replace Isaac as the son of promise with Eliezer of Damascus.

But more pertinently, this substitution and supersession of the Church for Israel runs directly counter, not only to the repeated expectations of the Old Testament prophets, but also to the painstakingly careful analysis offered by the apostle Paul in Romans 9 - 11. Instead of viewing gentiles as being grafted into the stock, root, and trunk of the Jews, it reverses the imagery and offers a gentilized gospel to the Jews.

We urge Christ's Church to quickly reexamine this most important doctrine, for with it goes not only the investment of the Church in Jewish missions and her expectations of God's future work in the eschaton, but more importantly it involves the Church's ability to correctly proclaim the doctrine of salvation in its biblical fullness and the doctrine of the Church in its relations to Israel and the world. Moreover, it leaves Christ's Church helpless before a plethora of Old Testament texts, not to mention before Paul's *magnum opus* of Romans, with its constant reference to Jew and gentile in the whole soteriological argument, and the definitive emphasis found in Romans 11.

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¹⁹ Hans K. La Rondelle, in his work *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, Michigan 1983) actually makes the equation that Paul resists: he declared, "This passage has rightly been called 'the sharpest polemic against Jerusalem and Judaism in the New Testament' (DeYoung, J.C., *Jerusalem in the New Testament*. Kampen:Kok 1960 p. 106). Paul goes on so far as to equate "The Present Jerusalem, the nation of Israel, with status before God of Ishmael, who was totally disinherited because he persecuted Isaac".

²⁰ Gruber.